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RESEARCH NOTE

THE TRAVEL GUIDEBOOK: CATALYST FOR SELF-DIRECTED TRAVEL

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An increasing number of travelers are using various sources in order to enhance their travel experience. One overlooked resource is the travel guidebook. To this end, the purpose of this study was to understand the role of the guidebook in the travel experience. Research questions focused on how the traveler is using the guidebook. The study utilized “on the spot” interviews of tourists as well as a questionnaire. Sixty-one tourists or groups of tourists with a total of 137 people were interviewed. As a follow-up, a questionnaire about travel and guidebooks was completed by 98 tourists. Findings from this research indicate the following ideas. Tourist guidebooks are a catalyst for travel by allowing freedom of movement and increased knowledge of their visit. Tourist guidebooks add an educational component to travel. Most independent travelers are using some type of guidebook. More and more independent travelers are using the Internet for travel questions, and many of them are carrying this information in hand-held electronic devices. The guidebook has become a liberating aspect of travel by allowing the traveler to become more self-directed. This new information is often self-modeled while looking and following the concepts within the guidebook.

Key words: Travel guidebook; Self-directed learning; Leisure learning; Self-modeling; Educational travel

Introduction

Participants in the tourism industry may assume travelers want top amenities such as five-star hotels, taxis, first-class seats, and signature luggage. In contrast, the independent tourist, who makes most of the decisions of their travel experience, is often setting aside the luxuries within tourism for other

desires such as authentic experiences, avoiding the crowd, or education. One way that tourists are improving their experience is through the use of travel guidebooks. It is a common sight to see a tourist with a guidebook in their hand, yet guidebooks are rarely mentioned in research. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the role of the guidebook in the travel experience. Research

questions include the following. How is the tourist using the guidebook? Which guidebooks are being used? How is the use of the guidebook impacting the travel experience?

Literature Review

Travelers who want to learn more about their experience utilize additional material. Tsaur, Yen, and Chen's (2010) research indicated independent tourists demonstrate several skills such as on-site tourism capability, pretrip preparation, and emergency response. Independent tourists are moving in a small group, they must think for themselves, and they often will take a risk in their tourism. All of this forces them to concentrate and learn more, especially in comparison to the tourist who is in a group following a tour guide. They also showed, similar to Pearce and Foster (2007), how "backpacking" travelers were a classic case of the independent tourist, and their experiences involved problem solving and interpersonal and social skills. These independent tourists use a variety of learning resources such as guidebooks and information from other tourists. Scarinci and Pearce (2012) also discuss an educational component of tourism. Key skills seen as influenced by travel included independence, being open-minded, and feeling comfortable around different types of people.

Not only has there been an increase in travel guide books, there has also been an increase in the use of Internet concerning travel. MacKay and Vogt's (2012) research focused on the current use of the Internet for tourism. During this 2-year project there was an increase of Internet use as well as an adoption of new ways to use the internet. Also, Choi, Lehto, and Morrison (2007) discuss the increase of Internet use and how this is affecting many aspects of tourism both positive and negative.

Some travelers are making trips specifically to learn about certain places in history. Cohen's (2011) research encourages tourists to visit places associated with difficult events or "dark sites." Cohen discusses how an educational dimension may help distinguish meaningful dark tourism experiences from recreational ones. Also, Burbidge's (2012) study focuses on the tourism behavior of those who are staying in another country for an extended time. These "tourists" demand detailed information

concerning tourism as well as various needs while they are living in another country. The travel guide often becomes a significant part of their daily life.

Similarly, Lee, Agarwal, and Kim (2012) found that word of mouth, the Internet, and travel guidebooks were the top three sources of information used by tourists with disabilities. Also, Young's (2008) research on the travel experiences in aboriginal Australia reveals that guidebooks shape and frame particular travel pursuits by offering the tourist an alternative experience of the destination, indigenous people, and culture.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand the role of the guidebook in the travel experience. Research questions include the following. How is the tourist using the guidebook? Which guidebooks are being used? How is the use of the guidebook impacting the travel experience? To this end the study utilized "on the spot" interviews of tourists as well as a questionnaire. Sixty-one tourists or groups of tourists with a total of 137 people were interviewed. As a follow-up, a questionnaire about travel and guidebooks was completed by 98 tourists. Ethical guidelines were observed and approval was gained by each participant. Tourists with guidebooks were approached in a concentrated area of tourists in the country of Croatia. They were asked if they would be a part of this research by answering questions about their travel experience and their guidebook. If they spoke English, and agreed, they would complete the study questionnaire. Approximately 61 groups of tourists out of 100 participated. The study incorporated a semistructured interactive conversation for this interview, and the information was eventually summarized on a digital recorder. A set of similar questions in the questionnaire was posed: Tell me about your travel experience. Tell me about your guidebook. How are you using it? Can I see it? What do you like, or not like about this book? It was intended to be a brief, nonintrusive, semistructured conversation about a guidebook.

Most interviews were with small groups or families. Usually the person who had organized the trip, or who spoke English, would speak. However, an attempt was made on each interview to get the opinion of all the adults. Upon hearing repeated

answers data saturation was reached, and this part of the research was concluded. I listened to these interviews several times and wrote down the main topics according to the purpose of the study and the research questions based on principles of constant comparative research evaluation (Merriam, 1998). There were a total of 61 interviews that involved 137 people that took place over 25 days in the summer of 2011. In order to add to the validity of this research, a questionnaire was developed and written for tourists about the topic of this study. This questionnaire is available from the author upon request. The study chose another popular travel destination for this questionnaire: Prague, Czech Republic. Permission was secured to give the questionnaire to the clients of a restaurant that caters to tourists over a 5-day period. A total of 98 questionnaires were returned. The results were also evaluated according to the purpose of the study and the research questions using the constant comparative method.

Findings

The findings are discussed between these two different styles of research. First, the study will disclose information received as the result of the interviews. Second, this will be followed by the results of the questionnaire (Tables 1–3).

One couple touring from Belgium said: “We are using *Geo Guide*, and it is our companion, we had information from the tourist center, but we were still lost. But the guide book shows us everything from the cheapest place to stay to where to eat.” The guidebook was open in their hand, and they

held it in front of them. One couple from Spain explained they will first go to the library, look at all the guidebooks, and then they decide which one to get. They emphasized that touring with a child, it has been extremely helpful.

One couple from Italy had the *Lonely Planet*. “Having this book makes our trip complete.” There were many pages turned down, and they had written a variety of notes inside. Furthermore, it was noted that the couple opened the guidebook, pointed and walked to a nearby church, and read the information inside the book. One family from France was using the *Rough Guide*. She said, “I was afraid to come to Zagreb, but having this book I am calm and confident. We are using this all the time, every day, in each situation.”

One couple from Spain shared their *Let's Go* book. “It was expensive and it is heavy but we don't care, we plan our entire trip around this book.” Two women touring from Finland bought the *Berlitz* book there and in their own language. They read the book before and during the trip. Later they downloaded the *Lonely Planet* section of Croatia, in English, to their mobile phone for 2 euro. They compared the information from both. Some tourists who were interviewed would also print a copy of the PDF file and take it with them in their hand. Similarly, two men from Spain had the *Lonely Planet*, but they also used the local free tour guidebook called *Zagreb in Your Pocket* they found in one museum. This second book, in English, was completely marked with notes and many pages were turned down.

Tourists also stated some things they do not like about the travel guidebook. For example, one tourist pointed to the map in the guidebook which was clearly wrong. Another couple said they prefer to use information from the local tourist center. “Those books have become too expensive and once they put something in there everyone is going.” A group of students from Sweden did not want a guidebook; they prefer to be more spontaneous, getting information at the moment. One couple said the guidebook never offers up-to-date information on current topics such as politics. Two tourists who had a *Rick Steves*’ book and a downloaded PDF file described how the longer they travel, the more they put these sources of information away, and become more spontaneous.

Table 1
Which Travel Guide Are You Using?

Travel Guide Book Title	No. of Respondents
<i>Lonely Planet</i>	12
<i>Rick Steves</i>	3
Tourist Information Center	3
<i>Geo Guide</i>	2
<i>Eyewitness Guide</i>	2
<i>Rough Guide</i>	2
<i>Let's Go</i> , <i>Michelin</i> , <i>Berlitz</i> , <i>Walking the Earth</i> , <i>Capital Guide</i> , <i>Shoestring Guide</i>	1
The use of more than one book	8

Table 2
Source of Information During Travel

Sources of Information for Travelers	Type of Information
Travel guidebook	42 tourists (<i>Lonely Planet</i> 12, <i>Rick Steves</i> 3, various tourist information 3)
Downloaded information from Internet site to a hand-held device	4 tourists (Trip Advisor, Wikitravel, Google, Travel blog)
People	12 tourists (Tourist information center 6, friend 2, partner 2, strangers nearby 2, hotel 2)
Continued use of Internet while travel	14 tourists

Table 3
Summary of Answers to Questionnaire

Question	Response
Question 1. Describe your current trip?	Travel—72 tourists Study abroad—17 tourists Travel and work—7 tourists
Question 2. How many are with you?	Alone—3 tourists 2 travelers—24 tourists 3–5 travelers—43 tourists 6–16 travelers—11 tourists 17–150—18 tourists
Question 3. What have you enjoyed?	Prague and its architecture—42 tourists European culture—23 tourists Food and drink—17 tourists History—12 tourists People I am with—10 tourists Sightseeing—8 tourists
Question 4. What has been difficult about this trip?	Language—30 tourists Weather—9 tourists Public transportation—6 tourists
Question 5, part one. Are you using a travel guidebook?	Yes—57 tourists (<i>Lonely Planet</i> —19, <i>Rick Steves</i> —8, <i>Frommers</i> —4, Top 10 travel guide—4) No—38 tourists
Question 5, part two. Are you using other information in addition to travel guidebook?	Yes—75 tourists (Internet—50, Friends—9, Map—7)
Question 6. What is helpful about this information?	Organizing of trip—76 tourists Theme for travel—5 tourists Local places to go—4 tourists More details and tips—4 tourists Better maps in English—4 tourists Budget ideas—3 tourists Public Transportation—3 tourists
Question 7. Suggestions to improve guidebook?	History—36 tourists Culture—25 tourists Language—12 tourists Life in other countries—12 tourists Different cities—10 tourists
Question 8. What are you learning while on this trip?	I bought the guidebook—25 tourists I downloaded the information from Internet—41 tourists I carry the information with me while I am touring—35 tourists Only sometimes am I involved with this—14 tourists Rarely am I involved with this—5 tourists
Question 9. Check as many of these that apply to you?	

The questionnaire was given to people while they were on a travel trip. As a result, the study received information from 98 participants; every answer from the 98 participants was included in the findings.

According to findings and the research questions, a high percentage of tourists are using a travel guidebook. The main one used in this research was *Lonely Planet*, followed by *Rick Steves*. Also, the Internet was often utilized by downloading information from travel sites and taking it on various mobile devices. Secondly, the tourist guidebooks are a catalyst for travel by allowing freedom and movement and increased knowledge of their visit. Third, the guidebook is producing self-directed learning among these travelers who are self-modeling the images and words they are reading in these travel guides.

Discussion

The study participants reflected closely aligned ideas of a previous research (Roberson, Jr., 2003); as a result of travel they have useful information about the world, new ideas about their home, and they are seeing themselves in a new way. In this recent study the participant's use of guidebooks resulted in a level of self-direction in travel. The guidebook enabled them to self-plan (Tough, 1971) their travel. This informal (Candy, 1991) way of learning during tourism was a liberating experience. Further, the guidebook enabled the tourist to self-model (Dowrick, 2012) this behavior by reading and looking at pictures in the guidebook. This role play of walking down streets and finding certain spots allows for prompt immediate action in a challenging situation and results in a sense of efficacy among tourists.

The study participants wanted to learn and were aware that they were gaining new skills while touring, and it was observed that the guidebook became a primary instrument in promoting this learning. Similar to studies by Pearce and Foster (2007), Scarinci and Pearce (2012), and Tsaur et al. (2010), it was noted in this study that tourists were also learning life skills such as independence, open-mindedness, and a sense of confidence.

Yet, adding to this, the study participants stated that they were learning specific topics of history, various cultures, languages, life in different countries,

and the differences between popular cities. Important for this research, the guidebook had become a personal textbook utilized in the context of experiential travel education. Similar to Pearce and Foster (2007), the travel experience had morphed to a personal class of learning for the participants. Yet, this research adds the values of having a hand-held book by adding more specific information that matches the immediate need of the tourist.

It was found that tourists would become self-directed (Tough, 1971), self-modeled (Dowrick, 2012) learners (Tsaur et al., 2010) by underlining, highlighting, or imagining various trips while studying their own guidebook. This type of learning results in individual efficacy as they understood how to wander and meander among previously unknown and strange places. Travel has become its own type of school. This "school of travel" is offering a variety of classes such as specific cultures, languages, and geography, and its textbook is the personal travel guidebook. Further, this textbook becomes a personal souvenir, even a prized possession, where the participants continue to read and use as a reference in the future.

The guidebook became a way to negotiate the unique and clandestine constraints found in independent travel. Structurally, the guidebook can enable tourists to cross language constraints; this helps to lessen interpersonal constraints and promote a sense of liberty and efficacy. Although Lee et al. (2012) focused on tourists with a disability and they were one of the two articles to discuss a guidebook, there was a similarity between their study and this study. An even more interesting observation is that there were tourists who have decided not to use a guidebook. Their reason also coincides with Young (2008) in that tourists in search of unique places often arrive at "isolated" spots to find others with the same guidebook.

In their personal "school of travel," they were venturing into a spontaneous personal discovery of confidence as they began to travel. They did not want to be given any advice or explanation; they wanted to see if they could manage it on their own. The participants in this particular study did not want to be led, teased, or entertained by a personal or human travel guide. Instead the guidebook became their own tutor of information. This self-modeling and self-directed itinerary allowed these

independent tourists to become efficacious learners (Pearce & Foster, 2007).

The study participants stated the most difficult issue in travel is language. The guidebook, which is in the language of the tourist, becomes a new vocabulary to open previously closed doors. Also, almost every difficult situation could be solved with an efficient guidebook. The particular topics the study participants were learning became a veritable university (Pearce & Foster, 2007) of information offering self-directed courses in history, culture, language, geography, architecture, and art. What emerges is a "school of travel" of which the guidebook becomes a self-directed textbook offering advice on various places and topics. Wong and McKercher (2011) discuss the valuable insight gained from Tourist Information Centers (TICs). Only a few of the participants used the TICs, even though they are represented in most travel destinations.

In conclusion, tourists are learning unique topics as they travel with a guidebook, such as geography, architecture, local cuisine, and language. Second, tourists are becoming self-confident as a result of self-modeling and self-directed learning by using the skills they have garnered through the travel guidebook. Third, tourists are experiencing a liberating form of leisure learning (Roberson, Jr., 2003) as they master the unknown complexities of travel through the influence of a guidebook. Travel guidebooks have become a catalyst for increasing the value of the tourist experience.

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